



About URGE

Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity (URGE) is a national pro-choice organization that gives young people the tools and resources they need to advocate for justice. We inspire youth organizers to discover their own strength and transform it into leadership.

Working at the state and local levels on reproductive health and gender equity topics, we're a bridge between multiple social justice issues that young people care about. Through leadership development programs, trainings, conferences, and our network of university campus chapters, our programs reach young people in every region of the U.S.

As seen in:

TIME

CNN

The Washington Post

ELLE

Newsweek

HOUSTON★CHRONICLE

SALON

The New York Times

FOX
NEWS
Channel

For Media Inquiries Contact:

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We can cover interview topics such as:

- ★ Civic engagement and young people
- ★ LGBTQ populations and reproductive rights
- ★ Reproductive justice in marginalized communities
- ★ Student-led approaches to fighting sexual assault on campus
- ★ The role and impact of sexual health policy on young men and boys
- ★ Youth perspectives on the evolving feminist movement
- ★ Youth and student perspectives on abortion, contraception, and sex education policy (local, state, and national level)

We also have student leaders with this expertise in the following states. Contact us if you would like to be connected with them.

- Alabama
- California
- Colorado
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kansas
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania
- Texas
- Washington, D.C.

URGE is based in Washington, D.C.

Find us online at [URGE.org](https://urge.org) as well as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube.

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Mission and Vision

URGE envisions a world where all people have agency over their own bodies and relationships and the power, knowledge, and tools to exercise that agency. URGE builds this vision by engaging young people in creating and leading the way to sexual and reproductive justice for all by providing training, field mobilization, and national leadership for a youth-driven agenda.

URGE:

- ★ Embraces sexuality as a universal, positive, and healthy component of human development. We promote positive sexuality in culture, policy, and practice.
- ★ Believes that individuals and communities most marginalized by current sexual and reproductive policy should be the ones to articulate a new vision. We create spaces for these people to lead us to a different future.
- ★ Promotes bold, creative ideas and action. We are timely, reflect diverse young communities, and are building a vibrant, relevant, and fun movement!
- ★ Measures our work by concrete reproductive justice victories for our members, chapters, and allies. We approach each campaign with the expectation of success at the local, state, and national levels.
- ★ Works in collaboration and partnership with organizations, institutions, and individuals. We strive for transparency, honesty, accountability, and an assumption of good intent.
- ★ Values diverse voices and has created an inclusive structure.

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Our History

Gloria Steinem, Julie Burton, and Kristina Kiehl founded URGE as Choice USA in 1992.

Our first projects analyzed the activities of the religious right in elections, and promoted electoral participation by women, young people, and people of color.

In 1997, responding to signs that young people's support for reproductive choice had declined compared to previous generations we conducted two polls that confirmed that teenagers and young adults had come to accept many of the anti-choice movement's premises and values. In response to this, we created the Next Generation Campaign that focused its work exclusively on teenagers and young people. In the wake of a deafening resurgence of anti-choice activism targeting young people, it became clear that there was a greater need within the pro-choice movement to increase our focus, action, and training toward developing stronger youth leadership.

In 2001, we laid the groundwork to become an exclusively youth-led and focused reproductive rights organization, creating programs that incorporated the lessons learned from our research and validated by our field experience to regain young people's support.

URGE's programs were tailored to engage young people whose experiences differ markedly (socially and politically) from the generation of reproductive rights activists who fought to see Roe v. Wade passed in 1973. With this understanding, URGE built a network of chapters at college and university chapters to work on local issues and wield their collective power to work together on state and national change.

After a series of anti-choice laws passed in 2004, we led the youth contingent of the March for Women's Lives – one of the largest protests in U.S. history. For this event, URGE was critical in changing the narrative on the impact and role of young people in the pro-choice movement.

By 2010, URGE had campus chapters throughout the country, but had also begun prioritizing communities and regions that were typically underserved by other advocacy organizations. This intentional shift mirrored our ongoing commitment to prioritize and center the needs of those most marginalized in our society. In working with these individuals and communities, we saw that they were fully committed to working for choice, but also recognized that choice won't be possible without widening our scope to include all of the other issues that impact any one person's ability to choose.

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In 2014, we decided to adopt a name that better encompassed the issues our organization was already prioritizing and the direction we were headed. After consulting with our constituency, we changed our name from Choice USA to Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity (URGE). With our new name, we continue our ongoing commitment to developing young leaders, strengthening the progressive community, and building power to advance gender equity, sexual health, and reproductive justice.

Timeline

1992 URGE is founded as Choice USA.

1997 Began The Next Generation Campaign after our polling indicated a decline in young people's support for reproductive choice compared to previous generations. This was our first step to becoming exclusively youth-led and focused.

2000 Crystal Plati was named Executive Director of URGE, becoming the youngest person to head a national reproductive health organization.

2001 Adopted a new mission to become an exclusively youth-led and focused organization.

2003 Hosted the first awards event to recognize 30 reproductive justice leaders under age 30. This event later became the Generation 2 Generation awards.

2004 After several pieces of anti-choice legislation passed through Congress, URGE led the youth contingent of the March for Women's Lives, one of the biggest protests in U.S. history.

2007 Kierra Johnson became the executive director of URGE.

2008 Held the first annual Gloria Steinem Membership Conference for student leaders around the country.

2009 Members collected thousands of signatures from around the country asking the FDA to lower the age restriction on emergency contraception (EC) access. The FDA responded, lowering the age restriction to 17 years of age for over the counter EC.

2010 URGE and the Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR) came together to address the re-emergence of the "fetal personhood" initiative. Together we defeated Amendment 62, the so-called "Fetal Personhood" ballot initiative, 71 to 29 percent.

2012 Launched a new campaign called Bro-Choice to engage more young men in the fight for reproductive justice. After the positive response, several other leading reproductive justice organizations created programs to boost support from men.

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2012 Created the first cohort of Student Journalists, a program to train young writers and publish their content on our blog ChoiceWords and other influential news outlets.

2014 Changed our organization's name from Choice USA to Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity (URGE).



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Senior Staff Bios

Kierra Johnson, Executive Director

Kierra Johnson, Executive Director of URGE, heads the leading reproductive justice organization working to mobilize and provide support for the diverse, upcoming generation of leaders. A sought-after expert with more than 15 years of experience in the field, Kierra has bolstered the conversation around youth and reproductive justice through her contribution to print, radio, television, and online media, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN, *Newsweek*, Fox News, and National Public Radio. Hailing from the great state of Georgia, Kierra was awarded the Maxine Waters Reproductive Freedom Fellowship in 2000 and was the 2002 recipient of the Young Women of Achievement Award from the Women's Information Network (WIN). She serves as a board member for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Center for Community Change.

Mari Schimmer, Program Director

Mari Schimmer directs and supports URGE's national trainings and leadership institutes. A California native and a graduate of University of California Santa Cruz, she joined URGE after six years with Grassroots Campaigns, Inc., where she worked to build the progressive movement as Assistant National Recruitment Director. Mari oversaw organizing staff and volunteers to get out the vote through the 2008 and 2010 elections, and organized volunteers around renewable energy campaigns in Colorado, New Mexico, and Wisconsin.

Raquel Ortega, Field Coordinator (Western States)

Raquel Ortega attended the University of Arizona for two years, where she organized a number of social justice initiatives and successfully petitioned for the approval and hiring of the UA Women's Resource Center's first-ever paid director. Searching for new experiences, Raquel transferred to Smith College and she dedicated herself to empowering and mentoring young people through her leadership positions in Student Government, Residence Life, and on the Judicial Board. When Raquel graduated from Smith College, she received the Unity Award for her outstanding contribution toward promoting diversity and multiculturalism in the Smith community.

Kemi Oso, Field Associate (Southern States)

Oluwakemi Oso is a Southwestern feminist born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona. She joined URGE in May 2014 after completing her Bachelor of Arts degree in Gender & Women's Studies from the University of Arizona. During her undergraduate career, she advocated for students while working in Residence Life and co-chairing the Student Services Fee Advisory Board. As Student Director of F.O.R.C.E. (Feminists Organized to Resist Create and Empower), she aimed to make activism a focus for the group while building coalitions with the cultural centers across campus.

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